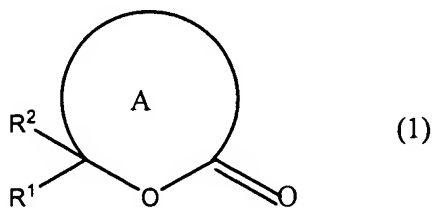


**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

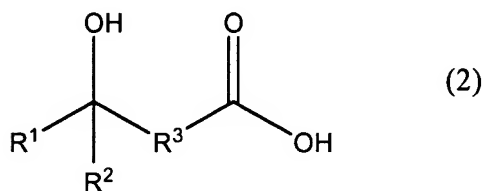
1. (Previously Amended) A method for producing a lactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and recovering the produced lactone from the medium.
2. (Previously Amended) A method for producing a lactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and lactonizing a lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid produced in the medium.
3. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the *Candida sorbophila* is at least one selected from *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 74362, *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 60130, *Candida sorbophila* strain IFO 1583, and *Candida sorbophila* strain FC 58 deposited under the accession number FERM BP-8388.
4. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is represented by general formula (1):



wherein ring A represents a lactone ring;  $R^1$  represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; and  $R^2$  represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; in which ring A and  $R^2$  may be bonded to form a ring.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is an optically active lactone.

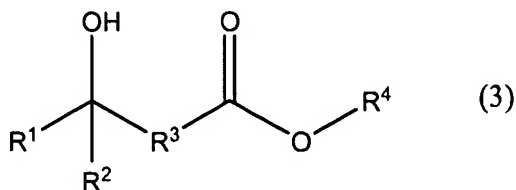
6. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (2):



wherein  $R^1$  represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group;  $R^2$  represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; and  $R^3$  represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; in which  $R^2$  and  $R^3$  may be bonded to form a ring.

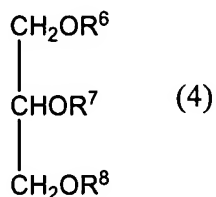
7. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydroxy fatty acid derivative is an alkyl ester of hydroxy fatty acid or a glyceride of hydroxy fatty acid.

8. (Original) The method according to claim 7, wherein the alkyl ester of hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (3):

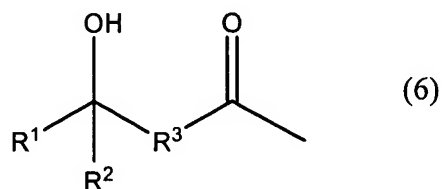


wherein R<sup>1</sup> represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; R<sup>2</sup> represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; R<sup>3</sup> represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; and R<sup>4</sup> represents an alkyl group; in which R<sup>2</sup> and R<sup>3</sup> may be bonded to form a ring.

9. (Original) The method according to claim 7, wherein the glyceride of hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (4):



wherein R<sup>6</sup> to R<sup>8</sup> each independently represents a hydrogen atom or a group represented by general formula (6):



wherein R<sup>1</sup> represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; R<sup>2</sup> represents a hydrogen atom, a

hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group;  $R^3$  represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; and  $R^4$  represents an alkyl group; in which  $R^2$  and  $R^3$  may be bonded to form a ring, provided that at least one of  $R^6$  to  $R^8$  is a group represented by the above general formula (6).

10. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein *Candida sorbophila* is cultured in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, 11-hydroxypalmitic acid, lesquerolic acid, 10-hydroxystearic acid, 10-hydroxypalmitic acid, and ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate.

11. (Original) The method according to claim 2, wherein the lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid is a hydroxy fatty acid of 4 or more carbon atoms having a hydroxy group at position 4 or 5 thereof.

12. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is any one selected from  $\gamma$ -decalactone,  $\gamma$ -valerolactone,  $\gamma$ -hexalactone,  $\gamma$ -heptalactone,  $\gamma$ -octalactone,  $\gamma$ -nonalactone,  $\gamma$ -undecalactone,  $\gamma$ -dodecalactone,  $\gamma$ -tridecalactone,  $\gamma$ -tetradecalactone,  $\delta$ -decalactone,  $\delta$ -hexalactone,  $\delta$ -heptalactone,  $\delta$ -octalactone,  $\delta$ -nonalactone,  $\delta$ -undecalactone,  $\delta$ -dodecalactone,  $\delta$ -tridecalactone, and  $\delta$ -tetradecalactone.

13. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative.

14. (Previously Amended) A method for producing  $\gamma$ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, and lesquerolic acid, and recovering the produced  $\gamma$ -decalactone from the medium.

15. (Previously Amended) A method for producing  $\gamma$ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, and lesquerolic acid, and lactonizing  $\gamma$ -hydroxydecanoic acid produced in the medium.

16. (Original) The method according to claim 14 or 15, wherein  $\gamma$ -decalactone is an optically active  $\gamma$ -decalactone.

17. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 14 or 15, wherein the at least one is castor oil and/or a castor oil hydrolysate.

18. (Original) A method for producing  $\delta$ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing 11-hydroxypalmitic acid and/or ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate and recovering the produced  $\delta$ -decalactone from the medium.

19. (Original) A method for producing  $\delta$ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing 11-hydroxypalmitic acid and/or ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate and lactonizing  $\delta$ -hydroxydecanoic acid produced in the medium.

20. (Original) The method according to claim 18 or 19, wherein  $\delta$ -decalactone is an optically active  $\delta$ -decalactone.

21. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 14, 15, 18, or 19, wherein the *Candida sorbophila* is at least one selected from *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 74362, *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 60130, *Candida sorbophila* strain IFO 1583, and *Candida sorbophila* strain FC 58 deposited under the accession number FERM BP-8388.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Withdrawn) An isolated *Candida sorbophila* strain FERM BP-8388.